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RELI-GION IN THE USSR

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FREEDOM OF RELIGION- AN INALIENABLE RIGHT

In the Soviet Union, a vast multinational state, there are numerous religious bodies. There are followers of various Christian Churches—the Russian Orthodox Church, the Georgian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Gregorian Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Protestant Church, the Methodist Church, the Old-Believers' Church, and the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church. There are also Moslem, Buddhist and Jewish communities.

The Russian Orthodox Church is the largest religious group. It is headed by a Church Assembly, consisting of ecclesiastics and laymen. The Church Assembly, which

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is convened periodically, elects the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, who exercises supreme church authority when the Assembly is not in session.

At present, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church is His Holiness Alexius, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, who governs the church with the Holy Synod. The permanent members of the Synod are the metropolitans of Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev, the administrators of the Moscow Patriarchy and the Chairman of the Department for Foreign Ecclesiastic Relations of the Patriarchy. Local bishops take turns attending the Holy Synod sessions.

In administering the affairs of the Church, the Patriarch and Synod abide by the *Regulations for Administering the Russian Orthodox Church* adopted by the Church Assembly in 1945. The Regulations cover administration of church affairs and define the rights and duties of the church hierarchy.

The Russian Orthodox Church is divided into bishoprics on a regional, territorial and republican basis to coincide with administrative divisions. Each bishopric is headed by a bishop appointed by the Patriarch. The bishop also takes the title of his cathedral town. The bishop administers the affairs of his bishopric singly or with the aid of a council consisting of 3-5 persons. The bishoprics are subdivided into districts headed by provosts appointed by the bishop.

The Russian Orthodox Church also has bishoprics outside the USSR: in the United States, France, Austria, Israel and other countries. These bishoprics acknowledge the supreme spiritual authority of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

The Georgian Orthodox Church is an autonomous body headed by His Holiness, Efrem II, Patriarch-Catholicos of All Georgia. His residence is in Tbilisi, the capital of the Georgian Republic.

The Armenian Gregorian Church has followers in Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and a number of cities in the Russian Federation. The Church is headed by the Supreme Patriarch Vazgen I, Catholicos of All Armenians. His

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residence is in Ethmiadzin Monastery near Yerevan, the capital of the Armenian Republic. The Armenian Gregorian Church unites all believing Armenians in the USSR and abroad.

The Roman Catholic Church has most of its followers in the Baltic Republics (Lithuania, Latvia), in the western regions of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, and in certain districts of the Russian Federation and of the Estonian Republic. The Catholic Church in the USSR recognises the supreme spiritual authority of the Pope of Rome.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church has most of its followers in the Republics of Estonia, Latvia and partly in Lithuania. The Estonian Church is administered by a consistory headed by Archbishop Kiivit. The Latvian Church is managed by the Supreme Church Assembly headed by Archbishop Turs. The Lithuanian Church is administered by a consistory.

Most followers of the Protestant Church live in the Transcarpathian Region of the Ukrainian Republic. The Church is headed by a bishop. The Methodist Church has a few followers in the Estonian Republic. It is headed by a superintendent.

Old Believers' Church has most of its believers mainly in the central regions of Russia, in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Moldavia and the Baltic Republics. This Church has three entirely independent denominations: the Belokrinitskoye Hierarchy, headed by the Archbishop Iosif of Moscow and All Russia (Moscow); a church which recognises no ecclesiastical hierarchy (the so-called priestless); and a church which admits priests who have transferred from the Graeco-Eastern Church (the so-called run-away priests), headed by an archbishop. With the exception of the Lithuanian community, the religious societies of the second denomination do not have a religious centre.

The Lithuanian Old Believers' Church is administered by the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council residing in Vilnius, the capital of the Republic.

The Evangelical Christian Baptist Church is a volun-

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tary union of four previously autonomous denominations—Evangelical Christians, Baptists, Christians of the Evangelical Faith, Mennonites. The supreme administrative organ of this Church is the Assembly of Representatives of Evangelical Christian Baptist churches which is convened whenever necessary, at least three times a year. The Assembly elects a central administrative body—the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists. Between conventions this council is the supreme authority for church affairs. The All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists elects an executive body of five persons—a chairman, two deputy chairmen, a general secretary and a treasurer. The incumbent Chairman of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists is Yakov Zhidkov who lives in Moscow. The All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists has permanent representatives in the different regions, territories, and Republics.

Next to the Russian Orthodox Church, Islam has the greatest number of followers, ministers, and places of worship. The overwhelming majority of Moslems are Sunnites, with a small number of Shi'ites mostly in Azerbaijan and in the highlands of Tajikistan. Relations are friendly between believers of the different Moslem sects.

Moslems in the Soviet Union have no single religious centre, for the followers of Islam are people of different nationalities living in different Republics—Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens, Kirghiz, Kazakhs, Tatars, Bashkirs, Azerbaijanians and numerous nationalities inhabiting the North Caucasus and Daghestan. These people have different national traditions, customs and different histories. The Moslem leaders felt it would be inexpedient to bring them under one religious centre. For all that Moslems in the USSR are not disunited. They assemble regularly at conferences and meetings, discuss common problems and go on joint pilgrimages to holy places.

The Congress of Community Representatives is the supreme Moslem body. In the intervals between the congresses the supreme authority rests with the Moslem

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boards elected by the congregation of Ameri a. Hanman (called Mufti by the Sunnites, and Sheikh-ul'Islam by the Shi'ites) and eight or ten members. To handle current matters, the ecclesiastical board elects a presidium of three members and has its permanent local representatives. The structure and authority of the Moslem board are determined by Rules and Regulations approved by the Congress of Community Representatives.

At the present time there are four independent Moslem Boards in the USSR: (1) the Moslem Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, uniting Moslems of the Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, Kirghiz and Kazakh Republics. It is headed by Mufti Ziyavutdin Babakhanov who resides in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan; (2) the Moslem Board of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia, uniting Moslems of inland Russia, the Urals, Siberia and the Byelorussian Republic. It is headed by Mufti Shakir Khiyalitdinov who lives in Ufa, capital of the Bashkir Republic; (3) the Moslem Board of the North Caucasus and Daghestan, for Moslems of the Daghestan and Kabardino-Balkarian Autonomous Republics, and the Stavropol and Krasnodar Territories. It is headed by Khadji Kurbanov who lives in Buinaksk, Daghestan Autonomous Republic; (4) the Moslem Board for Transcaucasia, uniting Moslems of the Azerbaijan, Georgian and Armenian Republics. It is headed by Sheikh-ul'Islam Movsum Khakim-zade who lives in Baku, capital of Azerbaijan.

The Conference of representatives of Moslem Ulama held in Tashkent in 1962 decided to establish a permanent department of relations with Moslems of other countries. The believers go on annual pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia. They visit the tomb of the Prophet and other holy places of Islam.

There are synagogues in every large Soviet city—Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, Riga, Vilnius, Kishinyov, Tashkent, Tbilisi, Sverdlovsk, Simferopol, Lvov, Odessa and wherever there is a Jewish community. In keeping with tradition, there is no single Jewish religious centre. Each synagogue is autonomous, run by the congregation and the rabbi.

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There are Buddhists in the Buryat, Kalmyk and Tuva Autonomous Republics, and in certain districts of Chita and Irkutsk Regions. The Buddhist organisations are headed by the Central Buddhist Council; the Chairman of the Council is D. D. Gamboyev whose religious title is Bandido Hambo Lama.

There are also religious organisations in the USSR with fewer followers, for example, Seventh Day Adventists, Molokani, etc. All of them, regardless of their membership, enjoy the same rights as religious bodies with a much larger following.

Ecclesiastical authority in the USSR is based on voluntary recognition. Acceptance of and submission to ecclesiastical authority is the concern of believers and clergy. Coercion or punishment of believers and compulsory collections and taxation for the benefit of religious organisations or for any other purposes are prohibited by law.

Two forms of religious organisations are prevalent in the USSR: (1) religious societies with 20 or more believers (18 years and over), and (2) religious groups of less than 20.

Religious organisations enjoy complete independence, concerning their internal structure, up to and including the right to declare themselves autonomous communities independent of the religious centre. Religious centres do not hand down obligatory decisions or issue compulsory demands. Instructions are of a purely moral import, to be carried out on a voluntary basis.

A religious congregation may worship, engage in religious rites, hold religious meetings, employ or elect persons to serve the religious organisation, use the place of worship and other property, collect voluntary contributions from its members for the purpose of maintaining its ministers, the place of worship and other property, and its executive bodies.

At a meeting of believers, religious society elects an executive body of three from amongst the membership to administer the affairs and represent the society. A religious group elects its authorised agent. To check

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tary contributions, a religious society may elect an auditing committee of three persons. The executive bodies and auditing committees are accountable to the congregation.

Ministers of religion do not concern themselves with the economic and financial activities of the religious community. They confine themselves to matters associated with religious worship. Speaking at the 1961 Church Assembly, His Holiness Alexius, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, said the following:

"Ministers of religion must devote themselves completely to spiritual guidance of the parish and worship. Economic and financial matters must be the concern of the executive bodies of the faithful. An intelligent pastor, a reverential worshipper and, what is very important, a person of unimpeachable conduct will always be able to retain his authority in the parish. His opinion will be heeded and he need not concern himself with economic matters. He will be able to devote himself completely to the spiritual guidance of his flock."

All churches and religious organisations have ample opportunity to publish religious literature. The Russian Orthodox Church publishes the journal *Moscow Patriarchy,* the Armenian-Gregorian Church—the journal *Echmiadzin,* the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church—the *Fraternal Herald.* Religious organisations also publish the Bible, the Koran, prayer-books, church calendars, books of worship and other religious literature. The Soviet state provides them with paper and printing facilities.

The Soviet state provides the requisites for training priests and other church workers. Academies, seminaries and other theological institutions of the Russian Orthodox, Armenian-Gregorian, Catholic, and other churches, and similar educational establishments of the Islam and Jewish faith operate freely in the USSR. State authorities do not interfere with the educational process of theological institutions or the choice of applicants for such an education. This is completely left to the ecclesiastical organisations which maintain these educa-

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tional establishments and supervise the training of students for the ministry.

Nor does the Soviet government object to Soviet citizens being trained in theological colleges abroad. In recent years Soviet citizens have been trained, and some are receiving training, at the Al-Azhar (UAR) and Karauin (Morocco) Moslem universities, at theological colleges at Oxford and Cambridge universities (Britain), at St. Kasimir University (Rome), at the College of the Anglican Church in Merfield (Britain), Baptist colleges in Britain, Sweden and Canada, and in Göttingen University (FRG).

Religious centres in the USSR maintain extensive relations with kindred international church organisations. They take part in international church congresses and conferences on inner church problems, and problems pertaining to peace. Representatives of Soviet religious organisations attended the International Theological Conference in France, the Assembly of Young Christians of Europe in Switzerland, the World Congress of the Church of the Disciples of Christ in England, the European Church Conference in Denmark, the Prague World Christian Peace Congress in Czechoslovakia, the sessions of the Second Vatican Council in Rome, the World Church Peace Conference in Japan, the World Buddhist Congresses in Cambodia and Burma, the International Moslem Congress in Iraq, the European Christian Student Conference in Austria, the European Conference of Lutheran Churches of Minorities in Yugoslavia, sessions of the World Church Council, the World Baptist Union, and other international church conferences connected with the struggle for peace.

Soviet religious organisations are permanent members of many international church organisations.

The Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches, the Lutheran Church of Estonia and Latvia, the Armenian and Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches are members of the World Church Council.

The Christian churches of the USSR—Russian Orthodox, Armenian-Gregorian, Lutheran, Old-Believers', Protestant, Evangelical Christian Baptist—are members

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tion of International Organisation of Christian Churches, often called the "Prague Christian Movement for Peace."

The Lutheran Church of Estonia and Latvia, the Armenian-Gregorian Church and the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists are affiliated to the European Church Conference. The All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists is affiliated to the World Baptist Union and the European Baptist Federation. The Central Buddhist Council of the USSR is part of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. The Religious Boards of Soviet Moslems actively participate in the Islamic Congress.

Many prominent Soviet churchmen have been elected to the leading bodies of international church organisations.

The heads of churches and leaders of religious centres in the USSR have played host in recent years to some 70 delegations of churchmen from Indonesia, Pakistan, the FRG, Syria, the USA, Canada, Ceylon, Italy, Sweden, England, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, the Lebanon, India, Iraq, France, Austria, Nepal, Holland, Morocco, Ghana, Finland, Japan, Burma, Senegal, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, etc.

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EQUALS AMONG EQUALS

In tsarist Russia the Russian Orthodox religion was considered the only true religion. K. P. Pobedonostsev, Attorney-General of the Holy Synod, said this: "Of all the existing religions the state recognises only one religion as the true religion, and supports and patronises one church to the exclusion of all other churches."

Sects which broke away from Russian Orthodoxy were cruelly persecuted. Mere membership in a sect was considered a felony. Dissenters were banished to Siberia.

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They rotted in prisons. The "Code of Laws of the Russian Empire" read: "Parents who, although required by law to educate their children in the Russian Orthodox religion, baptise them or subject them to other sacraments and educate them according to rites of another Christian denominations, are liable to imprisonment of from one to two years."

The laws of that time defended the Russian Orthodox faith and prohibited the spread of any other. Catholicism and Islam were considered "tolerable," although Russian tsarist authorities did everything to suppress and restrict the activities of the Catholic and Mohammedan clergy.

The tsarist government spent enormous sums of money, about 50 million roubles a year, to maintain the Russian Orthodox Church—incidentally this sum greatly exceeded expenditures for public education. The salaries of priests and monks were paid by the state. No other church or religion enjoyed these privileges.

The Russian Orthodox Church engaged in missionary work among people of other religions. One archbishop described this work as follows: "The mission of Russian Orthodoxy in regard to other nationalities is at the same time a mission of Russification; Russian Orthodoxy must wage a twofold struggle—a struggle against other religions and at the same time a struggle against other nationalities' customs, habits and the entire way of life of people of other religions." In addition to clergymen membership of missionary organisations included policemen, prison wardens, etc. The Russian Orthodox Church advocated the tsarist policy of oppression of the non-Russians, and encouraged discrimination and persecution of other religions.

In the USSR the situation is entirely different. Here there is no dominant religion or church. The Soviet government treats all religions and churches alike and shows no preference for any of them.

The *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* was published on November 15, 1917. This document abolished all and any national and religious privileges

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and restrictions, thereby doing away with the discrimination of the different religions in the country as "dominant," "tolerable" and "intolerable." It established the equality of all citizens before the law, regardless of religious persuasion.

Following this Declaration the Soviet government published an appeal to all Moslem working people of Russia and the East, to all whose mosques and houses of worship had been destroyed and whose religion and customs had been flouted by the tsars and oppressors of Russia. It read as follows:

"From now on your religion and customs, national and cultural institutions are declared free and inviolable. It is your right. Remember that your rights, like the rights of all peoples of Russia, are protected by revolutionary power and the revolutionary government—the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies."

The decision of the Soviet government to turn over Osman's Koran, presumably written in the 7th or 8th century, to Moslem believers is an example of deference to their religious feelings. For many centuries curio-lovers hunted for this book which, according to legend, retained traces of blood of Caliph Osman killed by religious enemies. When in 1868, a tsarist general saw this rare book in a mosque in Central Asia he took it away and this led to mass unrest among Moslems in Central Asia.

After the overthrow of the tsarist government Moslem soldiers attempted to seize Osman's Koran by force, but the bourgeois Provisional Government dealt harshly with them. Now Osman's Holy Koran, which has been returned to the Moslem believers of Central Asia, is kept in Tashkent, in a building specially erected for this purpose.

Foreigners sometimes claim that the Catholic Church occupies an inferior position in the USSR. This is not true. The Catholic Church enjoys the same rights as the other churches.

The foreign press reports that Judaism is persecuted

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in the USSR, and seizes on any pretext to prove this. A boy shoots at a sparrow with a catapult and hits a synagogue window and the foreign press uses this as a pretext for a series of articles about anti-Semitism in the USSR and the intention of the Soviet government to "eradicate Judaism."

There is no anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, and Judaism is not persecuted. Jews actively participate in all spheres of the country's social, political, economic and cultural life. Soviet Jews are the equal of their fellow-workers in plants and factories, on state and collective farms, in scientific and cultural institutions, newspaper and magazine editorial offices, etc. Many outstanding scientists, writers, artists, composers, etc., are Jews. There are Jewish deputies in the USSR and republican parliaments and Jews are members of the national and republican governments.

In an attempt to prove that the Soviet government intends to do away with the "Jewish religion," from time to time the foreign press publishes reports about presumed mass closing of synagogues in the USSR. These reports are pure fabrications. If a synagogue ceases to function, it is only because of lack of interest on the part of Jews. And it is a known fact, there has been a decline in the Jewish religion all over the world. For example, M. Eisendrath, President of the American Jewish Communities, pointed out that the bulk of the Jewish population of New York are not religious and that eighty-six per cent of the Jews do not go to synagogue regularly. In 1954 E. Dobkin, a Jewish public leader, wrote: "We are upset by the fact that today 80 per cent of Jewish children throughout the world have no knowledge of Jewish traditions, do not study the torah and grow up indifferent to religion."

No wonder that many Soviet Jews are also gradually breaking away from religion. On the other hand, like all Soviet citizens, practising Jews enjoy complete freedom of worship. There is a synagogue wherever there is a Jewish community.

It should be noted that by publishing all sorts of

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cock-and-bull stories about the life of Jews in the USSR, the bourgeois press is pursuing political aims which have absolutely nothing to do with religion. It is a means of distracting the attention of the masses from outbreaks of anti-Semitism and racism in their own countries, and at the same time kindling the "cold war" spirit.

One Soviet journalist related the following incident:

"One day the editorial office of the Moscow magazine *Soviet Heimland* had a visitor—a rabbi from the USA. The visitor was most concerned. He had heard that Soviet authorities intended to close down the Moscow synagogue. While he was speaking to me I was handed some mail and I happened to notice the headlines of a New York newspaper reporting that anti-Semites had stoned a synagogue in Chicago. I showed the newspaper to the rabbi.

" 'Rabbi,' I said, 'no one's told me that it is proposed to close the Moscow synagogue. I'm sure it won't be. But here is a report that anti-Semites have stoned a Chicago synagogue. Tell me, doesn't this worry you? Perhaps you should return to the USA as soon as possible and look into this shameful encroachment upon the religious rights of Jews in America?'

"The rabbi answered:

" 'I'm not too worried about the attack on the synagogue in Chicago. America is a land of free people and everybody can do as he pleases. If somebody wants to throw stones at a synagogue, it's his business; if he doesn't want to throw stones, he doesn't have to. But I am worried about what might happen to the synagogue in Moscow. If it's a case of discrimination, we would be able to help you with our protests.'

"It seems to me that this episode explains something which at first sight may be difficult to understand. Namely, why should people, whose own affairs are not in order, want to intercede on behalf of those who do not need their 'help'?"

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In the USSR all churches and religions, all creeds are equal before the law. Regardless of the number of believers and ministers no church or faith enjoys or may enjoy special privileges.

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RELIABLE GUARANTEES

Long before the establishment of the world first socialist state, in their theoretical works, the founders of scientific communism defined the role of religion and the church in the new society. Studying the experience of the Paris Commune, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels noted the following essential guarantees of freedom of conscience: separation of the church from the state, expropriation of all churches as property-owning corporations, abolition of state expenditures for religion and discontinuation of support for priests at state expense.

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"The priests," Marx wrote, "must return to the modest life of private persons and live like their predecessors, by the alms of believers."

"An order was issued," wrote Engels, "that all religious symbols, images, dogmas and prayers, in other words everything to do with the conscience of the individual, should be eliminated from the school." Marx and Engels considered these undertakings of the Paris Commune, an augur of the policy of the future socialist state in regard to religion and the church.

Developing the views of Marx and Engels, Lenin waged a consistent struggle for freedom of conscience and complete separation of the state and school from the church, one of the most important and real guarantees of this freedom. "We demand," he wrote, "that religion be held a private affair so far as the state is concerned... Religion must be of no concern to the state, and religious societies must have no connections with governmental authority. Everyone must be absolutely free to profess any religion he pleases, or no religion whatever, i.e., to be an atheist... No subsidies should be granted to the established church nor state allowances made to ecclesiastical and religious societies. These should become absolutely free associations of like-minded citizens, associations independent of the state."

These demands were stated in the programme documents of the Communist Party and subsequently were reflected in the Soviet legislation concerning religious societies.

In pre-revolutionary Russia the Russian Orthodox Church was part of the state machinery. The tsar was considered the head of the church and had the right to include, delete and change anything in the church that he felt was not substantiated by the Holy Scripture. The church was administered by a Holy Synod headed by an Attorney-General, an official appointed by the tsar. According to members of the Synod, this official "commanded the episcopacy like a cavalry squadron in training." The members of the Synod—bishops and priests—were appointed by the order of the tsar. The

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Attorney-General had his say in all internal church affairs, including the appointment of bishops. All churches aside from the Russian Orthodox Church were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior and administered by a special department dealing with the ecclesiastical affairs of 'alien faiths' ". The activities of these churches were strictly limited by "regulations" governing each religion. Anything not envisaged by these regulations was permitted or prohibited by the tsar.

The priests performed state functions—the registration of civil acts, i. e., births, marriages and deaths. Consequently, the entire population was actually forced to engage in religious rites. The clergy was instructed: "If anyone admits to his spiritual father during confession that he has designs against the honour and health of the tsar or intends to incite mutiny or treachery, the spiritual father is duty-bound to report it immediately."

In the USSR, the church is completely separated from the state, both legally and factually. In other words the state does not interfere in the affairs of the church. The state regards religion as the private affair of its citizens and does not interfere in the internal, purely religious activities of the church, providing these activities conform to the Constitution and laws of the country. The state does not appoint or dismiss clergymen and does not alter established canons.

In turn the church does not interfere in the affairs of the state. It does not exert any influence on the internal or foreign policies of the USSR. Religious organisations restrict their activity to satisfying the religious needs of the congregation. They do not conduct special social and political activity among the population, do not set up general educational schools or form trade union, athletic or other organisations. They do not dispense charity and generally refrain from activity that comes within the competence of government bodies or social organisations which cater for the entire population regardless of religious affiliation.

In other words, all forms of union between the church and the state which existed in pre-revolutionary

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Russia have been abolished in the USSR. The Decree of the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars of February 5, 1918 *On Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church* reads: "Activities of the state organisations and public juridical institutions are to be devoid of all religious rites. The religious oath is abolished. When necessary, only a solemn promise is to be given." Civil acts are registered exclusively by civil authorities—departments handling the registration of marriages, births and deaths. The state does not assign any functions to the church, thereby permitting freedom of conscience for the citizens and enabling each person to decide the question of his convictions for himself.

The following question is sometimes asked: "Can a clergyman be elected to the USSR Supreme Soviet or any other government body?"

Any Soviet citizen may, upon reaching a certain age, be elected as a deputy to the Supreme and local Soviets. The clergy and religious teachers enjoy the same political and civil rights as other citizens without any restrictions whatsoever. However, no church or religious organisation may nominate candidates to governing bodies. Under the Soviet Constitution this right is only granted to social organisations and societies of working people. The church does not come within this category and does not enjoy the rights of these organisations. If the church were allowed to nominate candidates for Soviet governing bodies, it would become a political organisation. The clergy would rally its followers not only for prayer, but also for purposes of a political nature.

In the USSR the church does not dispense charity since that has nothing to do with religion. Moreover, Soviet people do not need charity.

The rise in the living standards, the elimination of poverty, hunger and unemployment has led to conditions where the revival of charity in any form would be impossible and unnecessary. When needed, Soviet people receive help from the state, the trade unions and other organisations. The state allots tremendous funds for maintenance in old age, sickness and disability; it helps families where there has been loss of the bread-winner,

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pays allowances to mothers of many children, issues grants to women during pregnancy and on the birth of a child, etc. For example, 10,449,083,000 roubles had been allocated for social insurance in the 1965 state budget.

In addition to wage and salary earners, collective farmers are also entitled to state old age pensions and disability allowances. Collective farm women are also granted pregnancy and childbirth allowances.

Under such circumstances, church charity would naturally play no part in the material security of Soviet people.

In tsarist Russia the church owned a tremendous amount of property. It owned land, industrial enterprises, trading establishments and bank shares. Before the revolution the Russian Orthodox clergy owned more than 5.5 million acres of land. Of this, 671 priests had 130,000 acres between them, i. e., more than 180 acres each; 589 priests had 270-2,700 acres, or an average of 675 acres each, and 26 of the most affluent priests had an average of 5,000 acres each. These lands were tilled by the working people.

The *Decree on Land* issued on November 8, 1917, deprived all religious organisations of the right to own land. All church and monastery lands were turned over to the people. The *Decree on Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church* declared all the property of religious organisations the property of the people.

Thus the church in the USSR has no right to own property. It may only purchase means of conveyance and other property required for church services and other needs of religious organisations.

Depriving the church of the right to own property is a logical means of restricting the functions of the church to religious purposes. This restriction in no way violates the principle of freedom of conscience since it does not interfere with divine worship.

"All church and religious societies," as outlined in the *Decree on Separation of the Church from the State,* "are subject to the general regulations governing private so-

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cieties and associations. They enjoy no privileges and receive no subsidies from the state or any of its local autonomous, self-governing organisations."

The church and religious associations in the USSR are maintained by funds received from the sale of religious articles, payments for conducting church rites, and voluntary contributions of believers. These revenues more than suffice to cover the expenses of maintaining ministers of religion, houses of worship, etc. Termination of material assistance has deprived all churches and denominations of the possibility of becoming privileged in any way.

Metropolitan Sergius of Moscow said: "The clerical bourgeoisie sees persecution mainly in the fact that the state has renounced its age-old union with the church. As a result the church or, to be exact, church institutions (for example, the monasteries) and the clergy as an estate or profession were deprived of some of their rights, namely, ownership of land and trading establishments and various class privileges not enjoyed by the ordinary people.

"And yet, on hearing Christ's instructions to the apostles, in the Gospel, reading the epistles of Apostle Paul or the life of some Biblical character like John the Baptist ordinary Orthodox Russian people are inclined to consider the change that has occurred, not as a persecution, but rather as a return to the apostolic times when the church and its servants pursued the true course, shown them by Christ, whereby they regarded their service not as an occupation, as a means of livelihood, but a behest of Christ's calling."

Depriving the church of property rights and state subsidies does not, as experience has shown, infringe upon the material interests of the church and the clergy. Today their wealth does not consist of property, but of large amounts of money received as payment for the performance of religious rites and as voluntary contributions from believers.

The foreign press sometimes claims that ministers have to pay heavy taxes. This is not true. The clergy are not subject to special taxation. As many foreigners visit-

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ing our country have noted, the clergy in the USSR are perhaps too well off.

In pre-revolutionary Russia the church played a leading role in the education system. All teaching was conducted in conformity with the dogmas of the church. Scripture was compulsory subject in all educational establishments. All schools started the day with prayers. Schoolchildren and teachers had to go to church. Many schools, so-called parish schools, were entirely under the jurisdiction of the church. The greater part of the curriculum of these schools consisted of studying prayers, the old and new testaments, catechism, Church Slavonic and church singing, at the expense of intellectual development and the study of the sciences. This system of education actually amounted to religious coercion since a child brought up to be religious cannot freely decide his world outlook or his attitude to religion.

In December 1917 all parish schools in the Soviet Republics, teachers' seminaries and all other elementary, secondary and higher schools and institutions under the jurisdiction of the church department were transferred to the jurisdiction of the People's Commissariat for Education. The occupation of teacher of religion was abolished on February 17, 1918. The teaching of religious dogma is not permitted in schools.

The state cannot undertake the religious education of children since in the USSR religion is a matter that concerns the conscience of the individual. To teach children religion would be a violation of their conscience and feelings. Separation of the school from the church means doing away with compulsory religious training of children.

Soviet citizens may teach and be taught religion privately. Religion is also taught in special theological schools set up by the church.

Soviet churchmen have voiced their opinion of the *Decree on Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church.* The book *The Truth about Religion in Russia* published by the Moscow Patriarchy in 1942 says: "The decree on freedom of conscience issued by the Soviet government as early as January 1918

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ensures every religious society, including our Russian Orthodox Church, the right and opportunity to live and conduct their religious affairs according to the requirements of the particular religion in as far as it does not disturb the social order and does not infringe upon the rights of other citizens. This Decree has played a very important part in normalising the internal life of the church. Under the tsarist government, the church was a servant of the state. The state, for its part, guarded and protected the church. State guardianship extended to the entire administrative system of the church. . .

"The church is strong in itself; it draws on its own internal strength. The leaders of our Russian Orthodox Church often forgot the words of our Saviour: 'The gates of Hell will not defeat the church.' Fearing unexpected storms and adversities church leaders resorted to external assistance from the state and demanded external state protection and defence of church interests.

"It is impossible to lead people to Christ by force, like fettered slaves; only free, loving friends and pupils may be led. The Saviour never attracted anybody by force and never used force to keep his disciples. He attracted people by the strength and beauty of evangelic truth. We need not fear for the Church of Christ. It is not state support that makes it strong but the activity of the Spirit of God within it."

The Decree of the Soviet government on freedom of conscience, on freedom of religious worship, removed the burden which oppressed the church for many years and freed it from external guardianship. This has benefited the inner life of the church. The Decree grants freedom and guarantees inviolability of this freedom to all religious associations.

In his time his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon made the following public statement: "We declare there is no power on earth that can fetter our sanctifying conscience and our patriarchal word." Metropolitan Sergius has also repeatedly made such statements in the press.

Numerically the church has lost many followers in Soviet times, since all pressure to go to church has been removed. People who went to church because it was

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profitable or because they felt they had to drop away after the separation of the church from the state. Only clergymen devoted to the church and the flock of true believers have remained.

The church carries out its religious activities unimpeded. Nobody hinders the church from performing divine services and administering the sacraments in accordance with its dogmas and canons.

Completely new relations have been established between the state and the church. Fundamentally they consist of protection of freedom of conscience and inadmissibility of church activities inimical to the state. There is special government body—the Council for the Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers, which supervises the observance of laws and decides practical matters to provide normal conditions for satisfying the religious requirements of believers.

Some foreigners misinterpret the functions of the above Council; they believe this Council is proof that the Soviet state interferes in the affairs of the church and directs its activities.

What are the functions which the government of the USSR has assigned to the Council for the Religious Affairs?

This Council must see to it that the laws and enactments concerning religious bodies are properly applied and implemented in due time all over the country.

It must investigate matters raised by religious bodies that call for appropriate decisions on the part of the Soviet government.

It must help the religious bodies to solve practical problems they cannot solve by themselves, which involve government bodies, institutions and enterprises—such as providing religious associations with places for worship, theological schools and other purposes, supplying building materials for the construction and repair of churches, residential and other buildings for church needs, making provisions for manufacturing candles and other articles of worship, publication of religious literature, arranging for foreign currency for churchmen travelling abroad, etc.

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all the Republics and regions, provides an important administrative and legislative guarantee of freedom of conscience in the USSR.

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BELIEVERS AND ATHEISTS

The Western press often reports there is strife between atheists and believers in the USSR. Actually there is nothing of the sort. As atheists, Communists have never called for and never will seek strife among people on religious grounds. The revolutionary party of the proletariat, Lenin wrote, is fighting for complete freedom of conscience and fully respects sincere conviction in matters of faith as long as this conviction is not realised by force or deception.

But Communists are opposed to religion and are waging a struggle against it! Does this not prove that relations between atheists and believers are hostile?

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The Communist Party does not conceal its views on religion and deems it necessary to struggle against religion, but this struggle is a matter of persuasion and not compulsion, waged only with ideological weapons. Extreme caution is used so as not to offend the religious convictions and feelings of the believers.

The Communist Party and Soviet government severely censure and punish those who are guilty of offensive acts against the church, the clergy and believers. The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party of November 10, 1954 reads: "It should be remembered that offensive acts against the church, the clergy or believers, are incompatible with Party and state policy of conducting scientific atheistic propaganda and violate the USSR Constitution which guarantees Soviet citizens freedom of conscience."

Churchmen themselves admit there is no hostility towards believers in the USSR and they have declared it openly time and again "Statements concerning persecution of religion," said Bishop Nikodim, "often confuse two different ideas. When the people in the West hear that anti-religious propaganda in our country has been stepped up many regard it as religious persecution, whereas it is something quite different—a struggle of ideas. Persecution means taking administrative measures against believers. But in our country equality of all citizens before the law is not merely proclaimed in the Constitution. It is actually carried into effect. Religious discrimination is as much a breach of law as national, racial or other discrimination, and believers actively assert their rights. Atheists have no right or opportunity to infringe on these rights.

"It seems to me," he continued, "that any unbiased person who is studying the life of our country will be convinced that there is absolutely no antagonism here between believers and atheists. In the USSR believers enjoy the same rights as any other citizens."

The Communist Party and the Soviet government have always opposed the division of the masses on the basis of religion, of belief in God. The strength of the USSR lies in the unity and friendship of its peoples.

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The division of the people according to religious principle would only play into the hands of enemies of the USSR, who would like to foster religious strife in all socialist countries, to create conflicts between the church and the state in order to divert the attention and efforts of the people from communist construction. Soviet people feel that unity of endeavour to create a joyous and happy life on earth is more important than an identity of opinion about life in heaven.

Despite differences in religion and the large number of atheists, the peoples of the Soviet Union live as one friendly, fraternal family.

A question often asked is: "How many believers and how many atheists are there in the USSR?" There is no way of obtaining exact figures. Official documents do not indicate a citizen's religious affiliation. No official has the right to question anyone about his religious views. One thing is certain: the number of believers in the USSR is gradually diminishing, not growing.

The Western press and churchmen often picture atheists as being immoral. They say "only a religious person can be virtuous." If this view were accepted as correct, it would mean that some of the greatest scientists, writers, composers and great names in culture and art, atheists of whom mankind is justly proud, would be considered immoral. The ideas of good and evil, honour and dishonour, justice and injustice, like all other aspects of morality, are not eternal and invariable, and cannot be deduced from the Lord's commandments. History determines ethics and morals, which stem from economic relations. There were moral principles long before religious ideas. Morality can, has and will exist without religion. It is the masses of the people who are struggling to build a society of justice and happiness for all who will ensure moral progress for mankind.

Every person has the right to decide for himself whether he should be guided by the dictates of religion or any other criteria in judging his actions. This right is inherent in the concept of freedom of conscience. Belief in God does not, as is well known, restrain people

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about immoral actions? Soviet people acquire moral virtues without religion. Moral concepts and convictions are formed in the course of labour as the result of educational work conducted by the Party, state, school, trade union and other public organisations. The Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union adopted at its 22nd Congress contains the moral code of Soviet People. It incorporates the lofty principles developed by mankind in the course of its age-old history of struggle against social oppression and vice. The code formulates new ethical requirements in keeping with the present development of Soviet society.

To claim that atheists are devoid of moral convictions which impel them to do good and restrain them from doing evil, is to slander the Soviet people, and the millions of people the world over who no longer believe in God.

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FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

Complete freedom of religion is part of the concept of socialism.

Freedom of religion in the USSR implies the right of every citizen to profess and spread any religion, the right to change his faith and the right to be non-religious, i.e., to be an atheist and conduct atheist propaganda. Such freedom can only be guaranteed when all citizens are equal, irrespective of religious affiliation or the lack of it. All these rights and conditions are actually ensured in the USSR.

In pre-revolutionary Russia the state, as has already

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been mentioned, interfered in the citizen's attitude towards religion. The laws did not permit a "non-religious state." "Subjects without religions," read one of the documents of the Ministry of the Interior, "are the most undesirable element in the state." Every person had to have some sort of religion, go to church and partake in religious rites. The tsarist government considered a non-religious person to be unreliable and suspicious.

The tsarist government persecuted people for the least manifestation of free thought. Avowed atheism was considered a henious offence against the state. Under the criminal code special punishment was meted out for attacking religion. "Whoever dares in a public place, at any fairly large meeting, to deliberately reproach the Christian faith or the Russian Orthodox Church, or to abuse the Holy Scripture or the holy sacraments, may be deprived of all rights and sentenced to hard labour for 6-8 years." Even if a person merely failed to report the "blasphemy" he was liable to imprisonment for a period of up to eight months.

A religious oath and a priest's recommendation were required in everything—business, personal life, etc.

Citizens of tsarist Russia were not free to choose a religion. A Russian could only belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. A break with the church was prohibited. A person who accepted another faith was subject to punishment. He could be committed to a monastery jail for an indefinite period of time and deprived of his children. A person who led a Russian Orthodox believer astray, i.e., convinced him to change his religion, could be deprived of all civil rights and condemned to a convict labour gang. At the same time changing over to the Russian Orthodox Church from other religions was encouraged. Followers of other religions who embraced the Russian Orthodox faith had to remain in the Russian Orthodox Church for all time with all their descendants. According to tsarist

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laws, people of the Christian faith were forbidden to marry non-Christians. Persons violating this rule were prosecuted.

Citizens who did not belong to the Russian Orthodox Church were deprived of certain rights. They were not allowed to hold state posts or, at best, held such posts with great limitations. There were also serious restrictions for such citizens in admission to schools. Jews were especially oppressed. They were forced to live in ghetos. They could not hold state posts and were particularly restricted in the matter of admission to schools.

In tsarist Russia freedom of conscience was entirely out of question. Lenin considered the tsarist laws on religion and the church to be the most unjust and the most shameful. "The church," he said, "lived in feudal dependence on the state and the Russian citizens lived in feudal dependence on the established church." The Great October Socialist Revolution has forever done away with these unjust and shameful laws which violated human conscience.

It should be noted that the laws and practices which existed in tsarist Russia still exist in some form in many capitalist countries where they do not have, and never have had, any real freedom of conscience.

At first sight, this may seem untrue, since the very principles of freedom of conscience—separation of the church from the state, non-interference of the state in the affairs of its citizens' conscience, termination of persecution of people for religious persuasions and equal rights regardless of religious persuasions—were advanced and justified by the bourgeoisie in its struggle against feudalism. "Religious tolerance and freedom of conscience" were slogans of the revolutionary French bourgeoisie of the 18th century.

All that is true, but it should be remembered that it is one thing to declare a principle and another thing to realize it. A person must not be judged by what he says or thinks about himself but by what he does.

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Bourgeois freedom must be judged not by what it is supposed to be, but by what it really is. The bourgeoisie proclaimed the principle of freedom of conscience, but could not abide by it.

It is well known that during the struggle against feudalism in addition to the demand for freedom of religious beliefs, the bourgeoisie also demanded freedom for atheists. Holbach and Diderot considered the right to be non-religious an inherent part of the concept of freedom of conscience. But on gaining power the bourgeoisie renounced such a broad interpretation of freedom of conscience since it found religion to be a necessity. It quietly discarded its free-thinking as Engels described it "like the young man who, feeling a bad case of seasickness coming on, throws away the lighted cigar he has been showing off with on board the ship."

In many capitalist countries there is a one-sided interpretation of freedom of conscience as freedom to choose a religion. Karl Marx described bourgeois "freedom of conscience" as "nothing but tolerance of all possible forms of religious freedom of conscience." Not a single bourgeois constitution as much as recognises the right of citizens to be atheists and conduct atheist propaganda. In many countries persons engaged in such propaganda are persecuted, while in some countries they are prosecuted for felony.

The laws of many capitalist countries mete out severe punishment for anti-religious activities, but not a single capitalist country has laws to protect atheists. For example, in their sermons priests may attack, insult, intimidate, curse and slander atheists with impunity.

Do you call this freedom of conscience?

In many capitalist countries which call themselves democratic non-religious citizens may not hold posts in state institutions.

The constitution of many capitalist states makes it obligatory for higher officials and members of parliament to take a religious oath. This is undoubtedly at

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variance with the principle of freedom of conscience since refusal of an atheist to take a religious oath deprives him of the right to hold a high post in the state.

As for the Soviet state, the basic normative act pertaining to religion was the Decree issued by the RSFSR Soviet of People's Commissars on February 5, 1918 (mentioned previously). This Decree was drawn up under the direct supervision of Lenin and bears his signature. All subsequent republican and all-union normative acts on religion and the church were based on this Decree. For the first time in history, it provided true freedom for all citizens without exception, believers and non-believers, and put an end to age-old violation of human conscience.

No Soviet citizen is forced to profess a religion or be an atheist, to perform or refrain from performing religious rites.

The Decree reads that "every citizen may profess any religion or profess no religion at all." Every citizen is perfectly free to take part in the rites of the church regarding baptism, marriage, and death, to receive eucharist, be confessed, etc.; every citizen may go to church or pray at home, decorate his home with icons, crosses and other religious images, buy prayer-books, church calendars and journals, the Bible, the Koran and other religious literature published by religious centres.

The USSR criminal code contains a special article providing punishment for interference in the performance of religious rites.

A believer may change his faith, join another religious congregation without interference. Soviet law severely punishes any infringement on the rights of the individual, whatever the cause may be. According to the Constitution of the USSR, "freedom of religious worship and freedom of antireligious propaganda is recognised for all citizens."

In the Soviet state there are no laws discriminating against believers or atheists. The laws guarantee equal

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rights to all citizens whether they profess a religion or not. Democratic rights and freedoms—the right to work, rest, education, material security in old age and in case of sickness and disability, the right to join public organisations, and freedom of conscience are guaranteed to all citizens of the USSR—believers or non-believers, be they followers of the Russian Orthodox Church, Catholics, Lutherans and Moslems, Buddhists and Baptists, practising Jews, believers in any faith or atheists.

According to the Decree, "all and any disfranchisements connected with religious affiliation or non-affiliation are abolished. It is prohibited to issue any local laws or enactments within the Republic to hinder or restrict freedom of conscience or establish any advantages or privileges on the basis of religious affiliation of citizens."

One need not provide information concerning one's religious persuasions to obtain employment or admission to an educational establishment. No one may be dismissed from work or refused employment or admission to an educational establishment on religious grounds. On joining a trade union, cooperative, athletic and other organisation nobody is asked to submit information concerning his religious views. The Decree required that indication of religious affiliation or non-affiliation be eliminated from all official documents.

A citizen's religion in no way affects his right to vote. The Constitution of the USSR reads: "Elections of deputies are universal: all citizens of the USSR who have reached the age of 18, irrespective of race or nationality, sex, religion, education, domicile, social origin, property status or past activities have the right to vote, to elect deputies, the only exception being insane persons and persons who have been convicted by a court of law and deprived of electoral rights.

"Every citizen of the USSR who has reached the age of 23 is eligible for election to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, irrespective of race or nationality, sex,

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religion, education, domicile, social origin, property status or past activities."

Justice in the USSR is administered on principles of equality of all citizens before the law, irrespective of their social, property or service status, race, nationality or religion.

Every citizen of the USSR is eligible for election to the office of people's judge or people's juror and has the right to appear in court as a witness.

According to the civil codes of the Union Republics, religion does not affect civil status, i.e. property, home or other rights of citizens.

All citizens, irrespective of religion, have equal status in regard to family and marriage.

In pre-revolutionary Russia only church marriage was valid. Children born out of wedlock were not entitled to civil rights as long as they lived.

Only civil marriage is valid in the USSR. Differences in religion are no hindrance to registering a marriage. The legal relations between husband and wife and between parents and children are not governed by the observance of religious rites. No religious marriage is prohibited, but such marriages entail no legal consequences. Soviet laws have freed the people from compulsory interference of the church in family life and have established the prerequisites for a happy family based on true love.

Sometimes we hear it claimed that children and adolescents in the USSR are forbidden to go to church and the parents are prohibited from teaching their children to be religious.

A visit to any church will prove that all churches are open to children or adolescents. They attend church services and freely take part in religious rites. Nor is there any law in the USSR prohibiting parents from teaching their children about religion.

For atheists, freedom of conscience means inviolability of their convictions and the right to engage in anti-religious propaganda. For believers freedom of conscience means the opportunity for divine worship and

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protection from abuse because of their religious feelings. This is one manifestation of the freedom of the individual in socialist society. This, in effect, is complete freedom of conscience.

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AUTHORITATIVE TESTIMONY

Soviet churchmen have repeatedly affirmed that there is complete freedom of conscience in the country. The following is an excerpt from an interview given by Bishop Nikodim, of the Russian Orthodox Church, to a foreign correspondent.

Question: Is it true, Your Reverence, that as the result of the policy pursued by the Soviet state with regard to religion "Christ is in his death agonies in Moscow?"

Answer: No, it is not. To say that, would be to give an entirely distorted picture of the life of believers in our country. I say this to you as a bishop

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of the Russian Orthodox Church well versed in the inner life of the church and what is happening outwardly. I can assure you we have many believers who are devoted Christians and confirm their faith by daily practice in keeping with the traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church. There is absolutely no reason for any talk about the death agony of Christianity.

Question: Do you think the policy of the Soviet state with regard to religion is at variance with the policy of peace and peaceful coexistence which it declares?

Answer: No, I do not think so. In our country there are many non-believers. They are not only critical of religion, they are waging a struggle against it. But they are opposed to religion as the expression of a certain system of ideas. It is perfectly obvious that contrary ideas cannot coexist peacefully. There is bound to be conflict between them. This is quite natural and everybody will agree with it. Atheists would like to see the whole world become atheistic, whereas our calling, as Christians, is to speak out for Jesus Christ to the whole world so that every person may hear the word of God and become his follower. Obviously there can be no peaceful coexistence in this respect.

On the other hand, when our government speaks about peaceful coexistence it refers to states and nations with different political and economic systems. Observance of this principle makes possible peaceful prosperity on earth. As for ideology, the ideology, which proves best in practical application in life, will triumph.

Question: Do the campaigns conducted in some Western countries deploring the life of believers in the USSR contribute to peaceful coexistence?

Answer: No, they do not. They increase world tension and create prejudices among people. I must say that the people who take part in these campaigns do not know what is going on in our church. Consequently they engage in erroneous generalisations, misrepresenting the true state of affairs and creating wrong ideas in the minds of people. They thereby help to increase tension and in no way contribute to the development

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of peaceful, friendly relations between peoples. To some extent they even hamper peaceful coexistence.

Question: What do you, Your Reverence, think about assertions that clergymen in the Soviet Union must hide the truth about the condition of their congregation from foreign tourists and delegations?

Answer: I consider this to be a slander on our clergy. When we meet our western fellow-Christians, no matter if it is in our country or abroad, we discuss various problems that arise in our churches, particularly the difficulties engendered by growing secularism in the world. And atheism is one manifestation of this. We do not, however, talk about things that exist only in the perverted imagination of some people or about things that do not exist at all.

It also happens that in observing our forms of religious life, our way of expressing our faith and the social activities of the church which differ from that of their countries, our western brothers misconstrue what they see as lack of freedom, the result of pressure on the church. But these forms of religious life have come about in our country in the process of historical development which differed greatly from that of the west. These are our traditions and we are deeply attached to them.

* * *

What can be more authentic than the opinion of eyewitnesses? Let us consider the opinions of foreign statesmen, public leaders and churchmen who have visited the Soviet Union.

Freedom of religion in the USSR exists for everyone who does not use religion for definite political purposes, said Dr. J. Endicott, Canadian churchman.

Bhikkhu Amritananda, President of the Buddhist Society of Nepal, said: "When I received an invitation from the Central Buddhist Council of the USSR to visit the Soviet Union I was surprised. In Nepal, as in other countries, people have the idea that communism prohibits free profession of faith. I was very much surprised by everything I saw and heard in the Soviet Union.

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I visited mosques, Russian Orthodox churches and Baptist houses of prayer, and saw that people may freely profess any religion."

"Our visit to the USSR convinced us that every person in that country enjoys freedom of religion. What we had heard about the prohibition of religion in the Soviet Union turned out to be a fabrication, just slander and deception," said Hazar Sagid, member of a Sudanese trade union delegation.

Sato, President of the Japanese Buddhist Association and General Secretary of the "Buddha Sangha" Japanese Buddhist Association, said: "I must say that Japanese religious circles are prejudiced as regards religion in the Soviet Union. They presume there is no freedom of religion in the Soviet Union and that believers are persecuted. Now we are in possession of extensive material to prove to the Japanese people that believers in the USSR may freely profess their religious faith without concern. We saw believers in cathedrals and temples. We can testify as eyewitnesses that believers in the USSR enjoy complete freedom of religion."

The article published by Muhammed Omar (Al-Karadagi) in the Bagdad journal *As-skafati alnegai* reads:

"I deem it my duty to expose the absurdity of propaganda conducted by imperialists and their hangers-on concerning the alleged persecution of religion in the Soviet Union. There is not a grain of truth in it. The real state of affairs is quite the contrary. I visited the country, met many of the ulama, inquired into the state of religion and saw many Moslems wherever I went. I visited their mosques and schools, attended collective farm meetings, went to industrial enterprises, market places and homes of the faithful in towns and villages. I am totally convinced that what the Soviet Union's opponents have to say is lies and slander. Moslems are absolutely free to profess their religion. They are true believers and respect Islam. All sections of the population have great respect for the ulama, the mosques, imams and their government."

Maulian Abdulhamid Kadri Badauni, prominent Pakistan Moslem leader, stated: "The mosques and mau-

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soleums of outstanding Moslem leaders are kept in good condition. They are run by the religious administration. Mosques are built and kept in repair by voluntary contributions of Moslems. The Moslem administration appoints imams and hatibs. The state does not in any way interfere in the internal affairs of religious communities. The administration of mosques, collections of contributions, etc., are in the hands of the Moslem administration. I am happy I had an opportunity to meet Soviet Moslems."

On returning home a delegation from Lutheran churches of the FRG issued the following statement:

"We now know that in the Soviet Union there are ardent Christians striving for large-scale construction. We have come to the conclusion that separation of the church from the state has been a boon for the church, enabling it to develop independently."

On leaving the USSR Wissert Huft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, said:

"We realise perfectly well that, if what is said in the West about the church in the USSR were true, we could hardly have had a meeting of the Executive Committee in the USSR. I am very happy I had an opportunity to visit churches in many cities of the Soviet Union and to convince myself that churches function freely."

Archbishop Hultgren, Head of the Swedish Lutheran Church, emphatically stated: "I was pleasantly surprised at everything I saw in the Soviet Union and found nothing that could grieve me as a churchman. I am leaving in high spirits."

On visiting Moscow, Leningrad and Tallinn, seeing many different churches and attending the services, Dean Haidu Peter from Budapest was convinced there is complete freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. "Now," he said, "we know how utterly false is western propaganda about the persecution and oppression of religion and believers in the Soviet Union. We saw with our own eyes that Soviet people worship freely in churches; and they seemed very cheerful and friendly."

Bishop Darani Laios, of the Hungarian Protestant

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Soviet Union. He said: "I am hurrying home to tell our people how your people live and what we saw with our own eyes. Western propaganda would have us believe that everything in the Soviet Union is in bad shape, on the verge of ruin. We saw well-being, prosperity and happy faces. In Leningrad and Tallinn we saw that the socialist state has not destroyed the church and the clergy, and we regard this as 40 years' experience of combining socialism and religion. In the West they asked us why we were going to Estonia where, by the grace of Moscow, we would be hoodwinked. But we saw things as they are, and Christians may now set their minds at ease, for we shall tell them the truth and unmask the enemies. It is a pity the Hungarian people did not know the whole truth sooner."

Other members of the Hungarian church delegation expressed admiration of all they had seen, saying they were now convinced of the freedom of the Catholic Church in the USSR. They were reassured about the well-being of the clergy and the existence of many Catholic churches often filled with worshippers. At a reception given by the bishop, Canon Moras made the following comment about the life of the clergy: "We were invited to a modest 'cup of tea,' but actually attended a feast, which made us realise that the Catholic clergy in Lithuania enjoy high living standards."

And here is what Doctor Horat said: "We have been convinced that the Lithuanian people have a bright future. The Lithuanian people love peace; they can and want to live in peace. The temples we visited represent great cultural wealth. The Lithuanian Catholic Church is well provided for materially, the state is sincerely interested in restoring the churches. Thanks to our visit to Vilnius, the love we have for the Soviet Union will become even greater."

All attempts by foreign propagandists to prove that freedom of conscience is impossible in socialist countries are repudiated by life, practice and policy of the Communist Party and Soviet government with regard to religion and the church.

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To those who claim that religion is persecuted in the USSR we can say this:

"Your sin is not the error you are committing through ignorance, but the malicious intent you have in your hearts."

Reactionary bourgeois ideologists assert that socialism excludes freedom of religion, and if Communists now profess their respect for the religious views and feelings of the believers, it is a "deviation from Marxism, a ruse," etc.

By this assertion they are trying to frighten religious people away from socialism. "Whoever believes in God," they say, "must be against socialism; a Catholic who wants socialism is no Catholic; a Communist who recognises freedom of religion in socialist society is no Marxist."

These assertions are false. No programme of a Marxist Party, no socialist country advocate or can advocate prohibition of religion. Religious beliefs, like all convictions, cannot be forced on anybody by decree or other administrative measures. Those who equate socialism and forcible inculcation of atheism display total ignorance of Marxism-Leninism.

It is well known that in his time Engels opposed the Blanquists, religious extremists who demanded that the "state of the future should 'prohibit' all religious preaching and all religious organisations." Engels ridiculed the authors of this programme.

He wrote: "And this demand to turn people into atheists, by the command of Allah, by an order from above, was signed by two members of the Commune who surely must have had ample opportunity to become convinced that, firstly, you may write as many orders as you wish on paper, and it in no way means they will be implemented. And, secondly, persecution is the best way to fortify undesirable convictions. One thing is certain: the only service we can render God in our time is to declare atheism a compulsory symbol of faith and outdo Bismarck's anti-church laws (Kulturkampf) by prohibiting religion altogether."

In his *Anti-Dühring* Engels also ridiculed the petty-

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bourgeois ideologist Dühring for his presence. Revolutionary ideas of prohibiting religion under socialism. He called these proposals a repetition of the stupidity of Bismarck's struggle against the clerics. Dühring wanted to out-Bismarck Bismarck himself by proposing most stringent laws against Catholicism, and against all religion in general. Engels called Dühring a gallant Prussian who "carries a gendarme in his breast." By setting his gendarmes of the future against religion, he said. Dühring helps to crown religion with a "halo of martyrdom and thereby to prolong its existence."

Many more examples can be cited from history to show that persecution of religion does not lead to its destruction.

It is well known that there were also attempts to do away with religion during the French bourgeois revolution. The petty-bourgeois political leaders of the time wanted to achieve this aim by issuing a decree to substitute a bourgeois "cult of reason" for the feudal Catholic Church. Such attempts were doomed to failure since the social roots of religion remained untouched.

Allied with the state for many years, the Catholic Church cruelly repressed views it did not approve of. To combat the heretical movement, the Catholic Church established a special legalised police institution—the Inquisition—which mercilessly persecuted everyone who deviated from the dogmas of the Catholic Church, and destroyed all who opposed it. Hundreds of thousands of people were tortured to death in the dungeons of the Inquisition or were burned at the stake. Yet the Inquisition proved impotent.

In Russia the tsarist government and the Orthodox Church also used savage methods to combat sectarianism, going as far as condemning heretics to agonising death. However, they failed to eradicate the heretical movement against the official Russian Orthodox Church and its dogmas.

Religion cannot be prohibited. Persecution does not weaken religion, on the contrary, it strengthens and consolidates religion. Declaring war on religion is, according to Engels, "the best way of reviving religion and of hin-

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dering it from really dying off. Oppression only tempers religion and gives it a certain appeal. This has been proved time and time again. People who assert that the Soviet government prohibits religion and endeavours to eradicate religious beliefs by force are displaying total ignorance of Marxism-Leninism on questions of religion.

Lenin always strenuously opposed suppression of freedom of religious beliefs. He wrote that the Social Democrats demanded that each person should be completely free to profess any religion. Each person must be completely free not only to adhere to any religion, but also to spread any faith and to change his faith. There must be absolutely no mention of the religious affiliation of citizens in any official documents. Not a single official must have the right to question anybody about his religion, that is a matter of conscience and may not be interfered with. There must be no "dominant" religion or church. All religions and all churches must be equal before the law. Lastly, absolutely no difference in the rights of citizens because of religious beliefs is permissible.

It is clear from the above that the founders of Marxism-Leninism did not identify socialism with compulsory atheism, but with complete freedom of religion.

The basic principles of the policy of the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet state with regard to religion and the church were contained in the resolutions of the Eighth Congress of the Party in 1919.

One of the resolutions of the Congress reads: "The Constitution of Soviet Russia recognises complete freedom of religion for all citizens, and the Congress calls attention to the absolute inadmissibility of any restrictions of this right or coercion on questions of religion. Persons encroaching upon the freedom of faith and worship for citizens of any denomination are subject to severe punishment."

Communists are certain that religion will inevitably die out, but that should not give believers cause for concern and uneasiness. Do Communists take offense from the claim that man and religion are inseparable and there is life beyond death?!

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Marx wrote that the "religious illusion of the real world will only disappear when the practical, everyday life of people finds expression in clear and intelligent relations among themselves and between man and nature."

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Captions to Illustrations

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2. The Cathedral of Sveti-Tskhoveli in the centre of the ancient Georgian town of Mtskheta
3. Echmiadzin Cathedral (Armenian SSR)
4. Catholic church in Leningrad
5. Evangelical-Lutheran church (Latvian SSR)
6. Taze-Pir Mosque in the city of Baku (Azerbaijan SSR)
7. Buddhist monastery in Aginsk (Chita Region)
8. A synagogue in Tbilisi (Georgian SSR)
9. The Church of the Holy Mother's Robe in Moscow
10. The Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev after restoration
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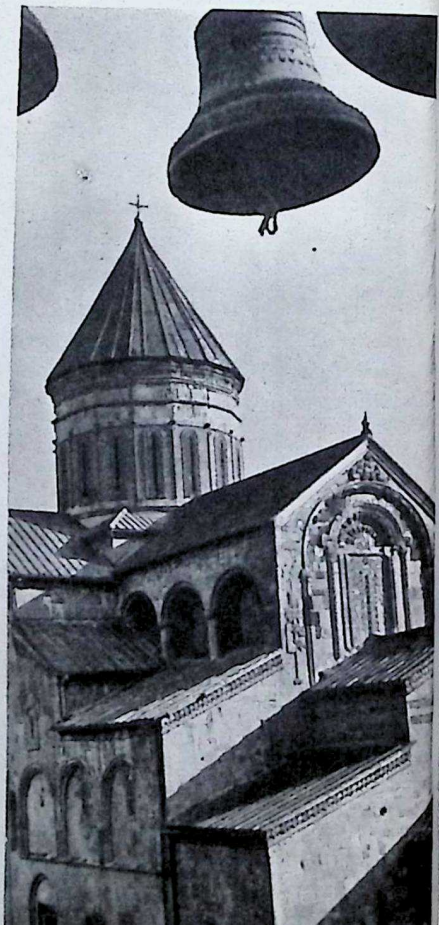

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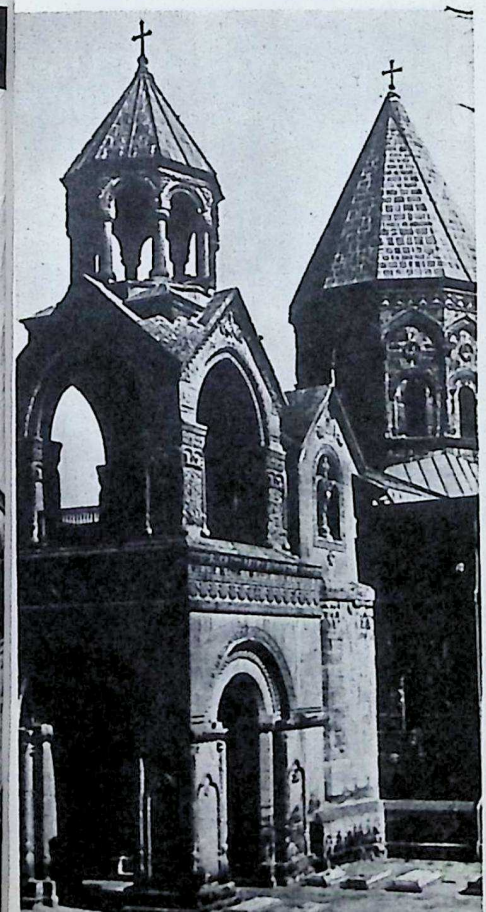

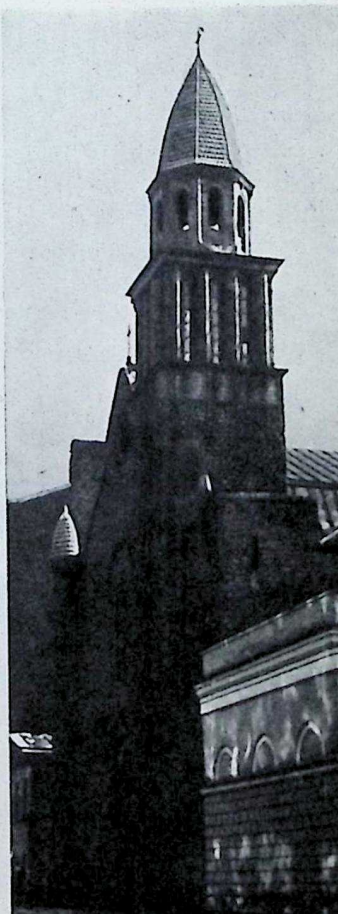

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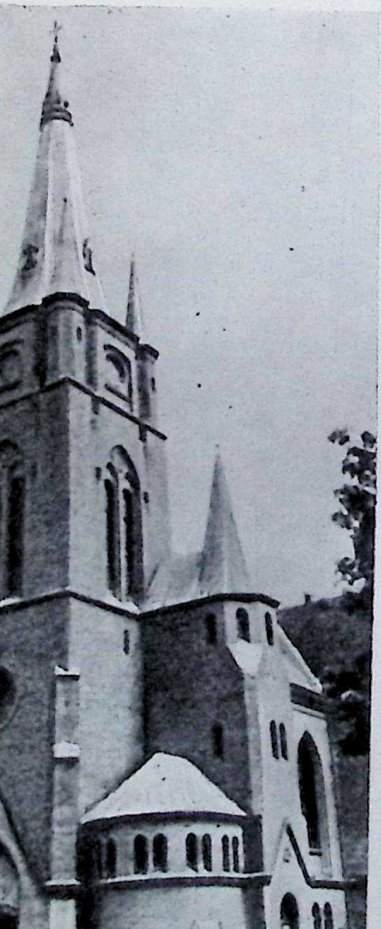

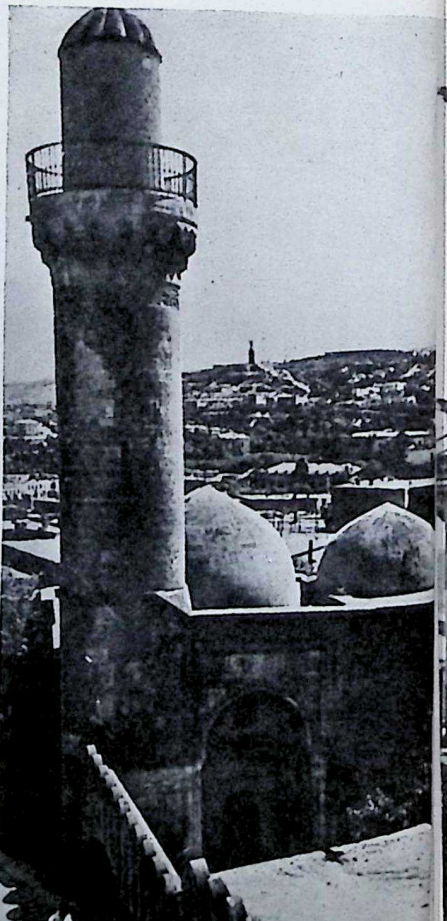

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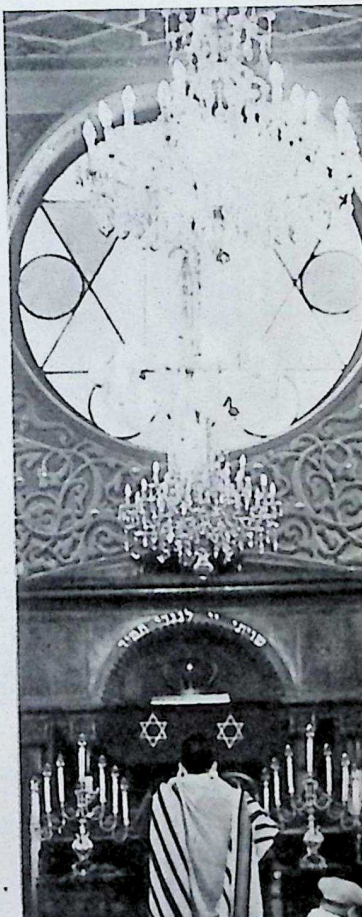

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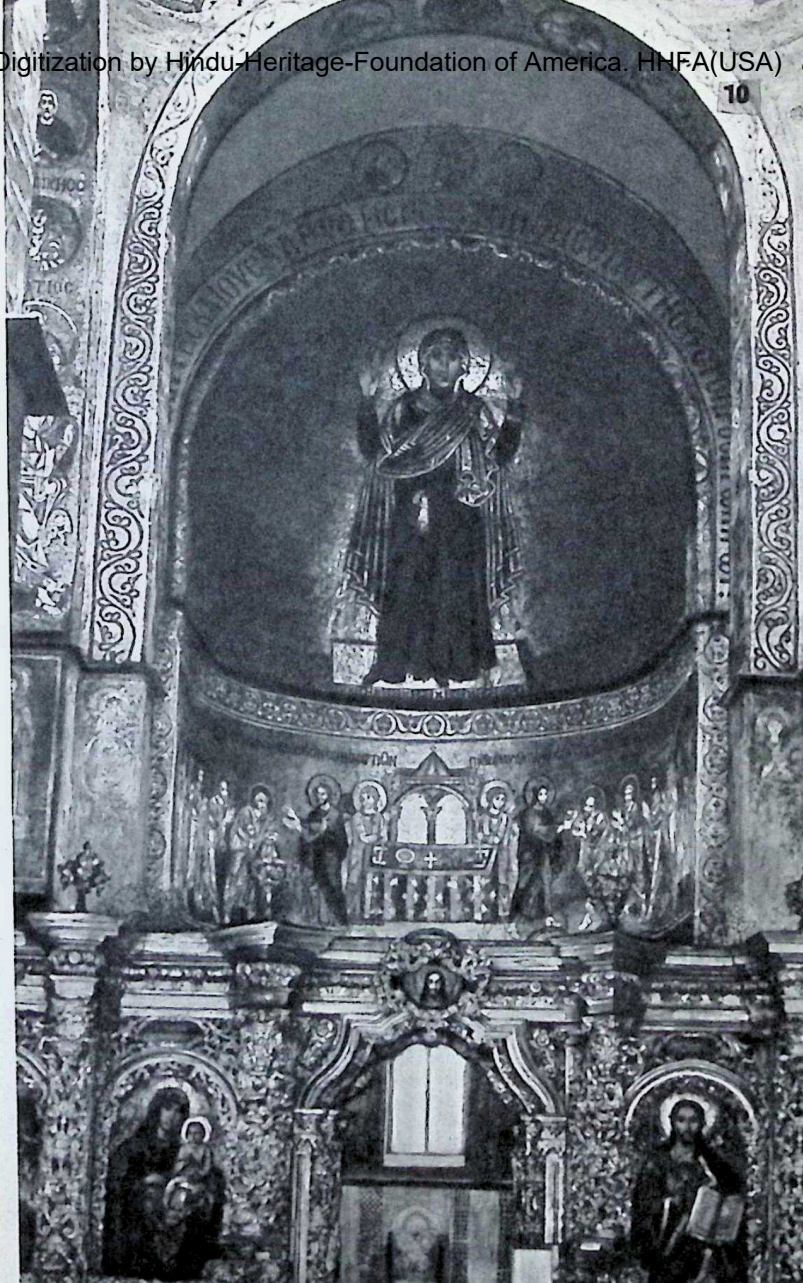

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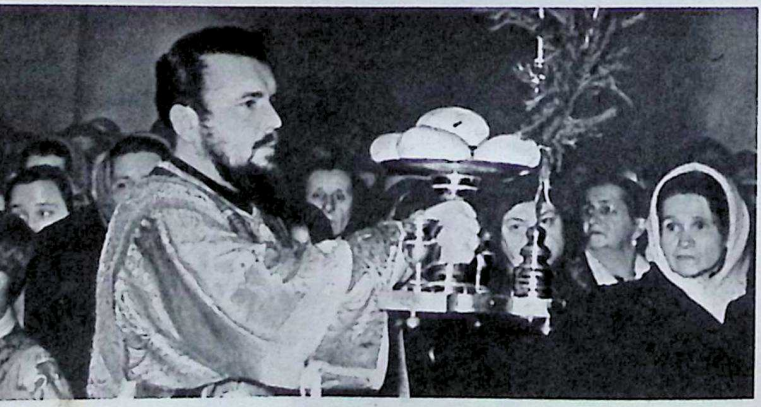

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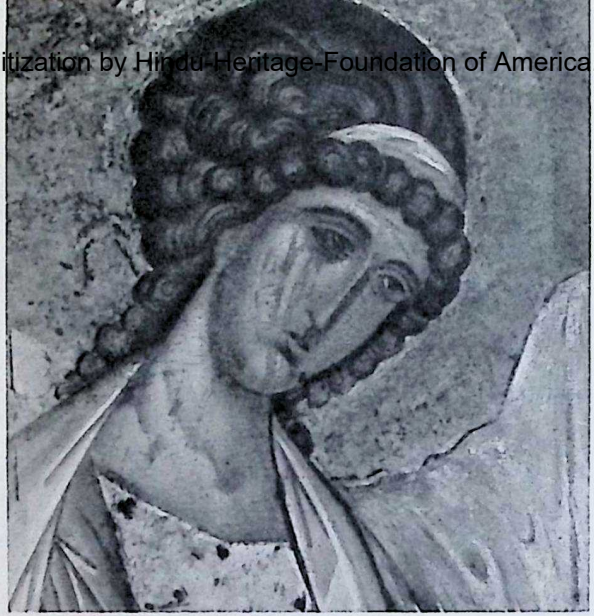

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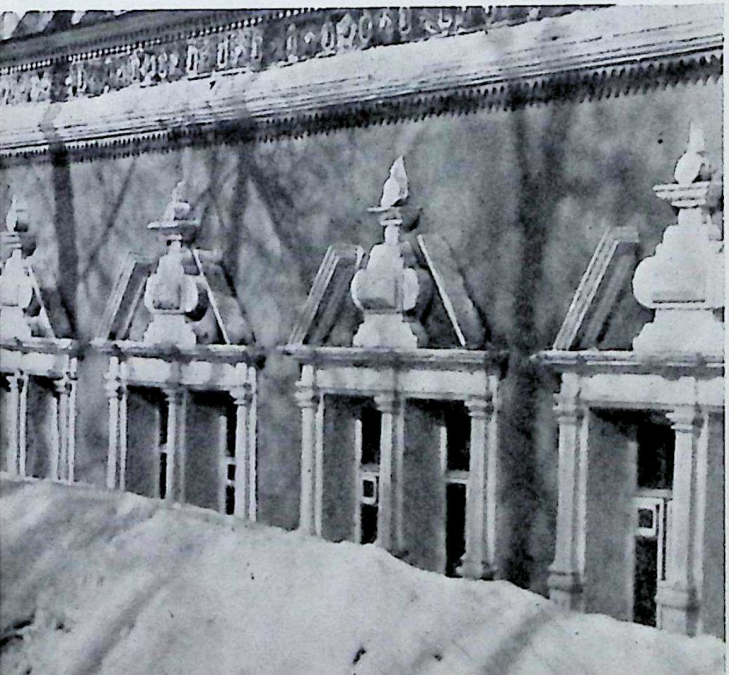

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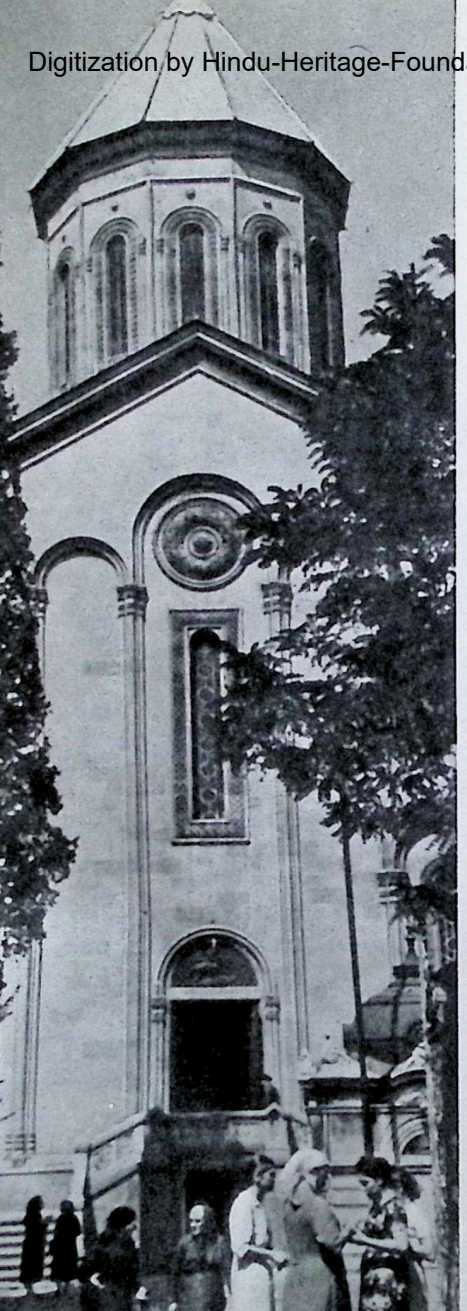

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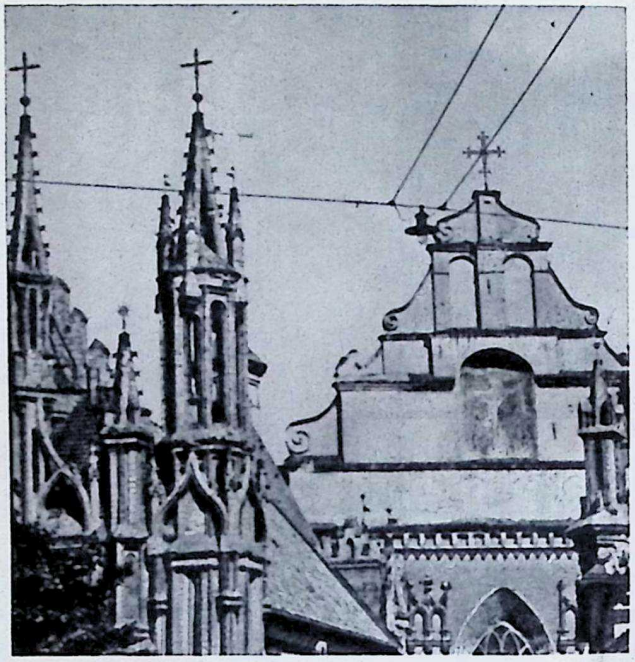

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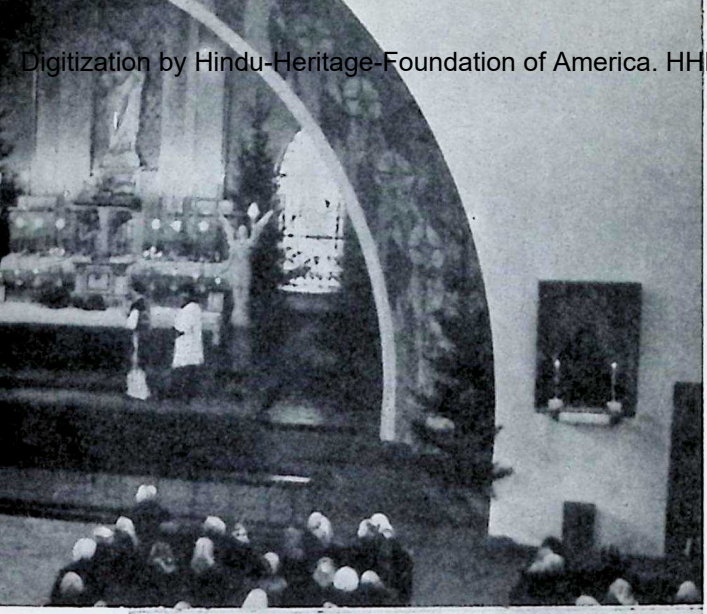

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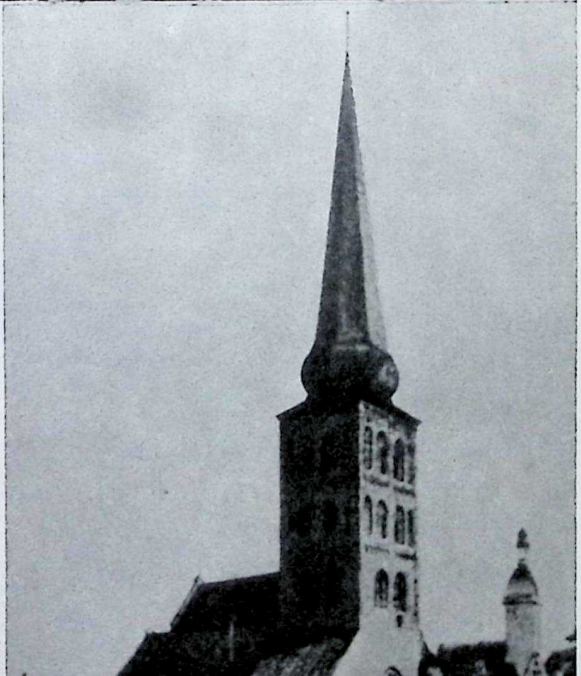

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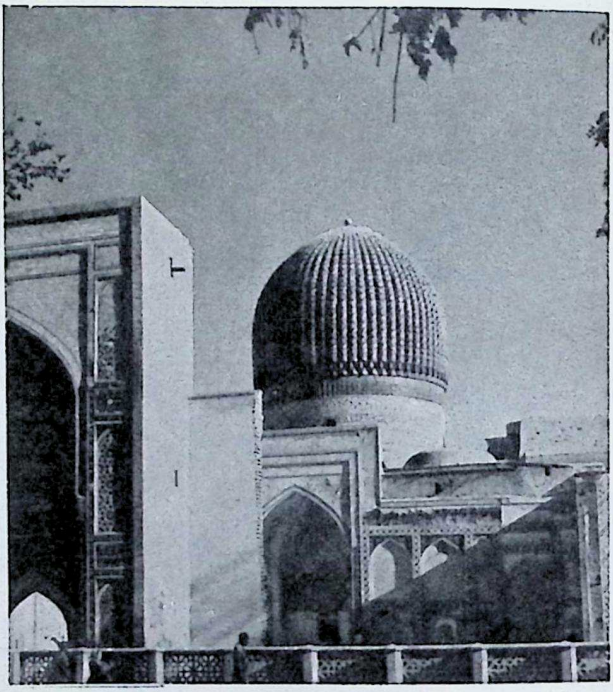

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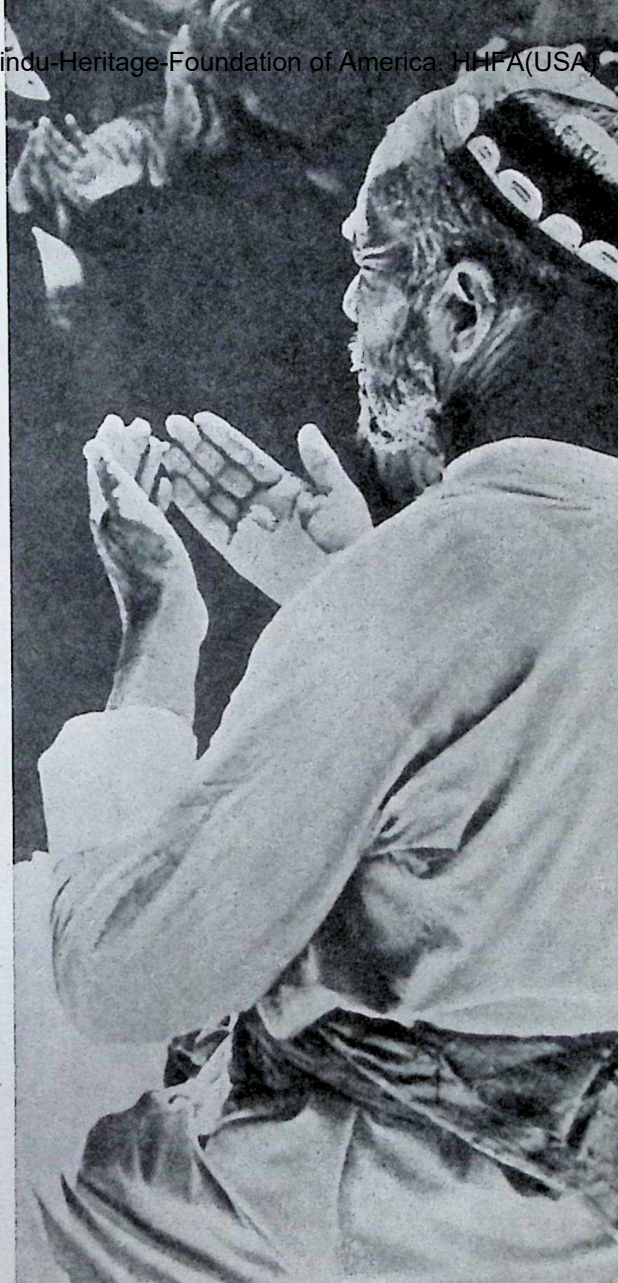

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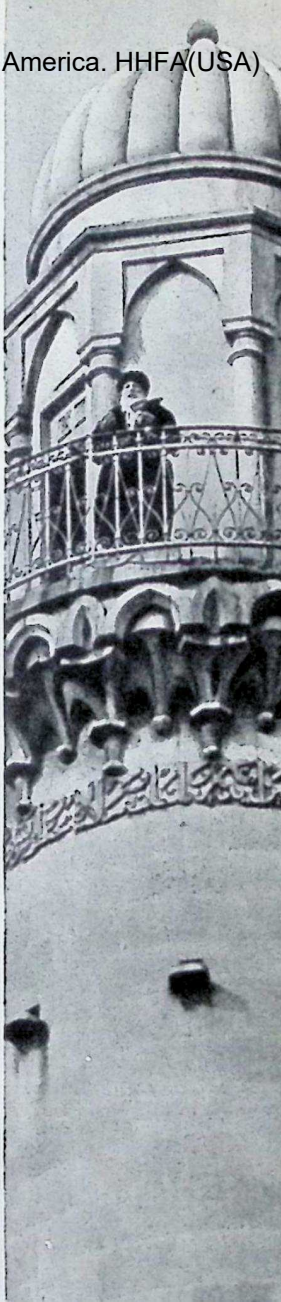

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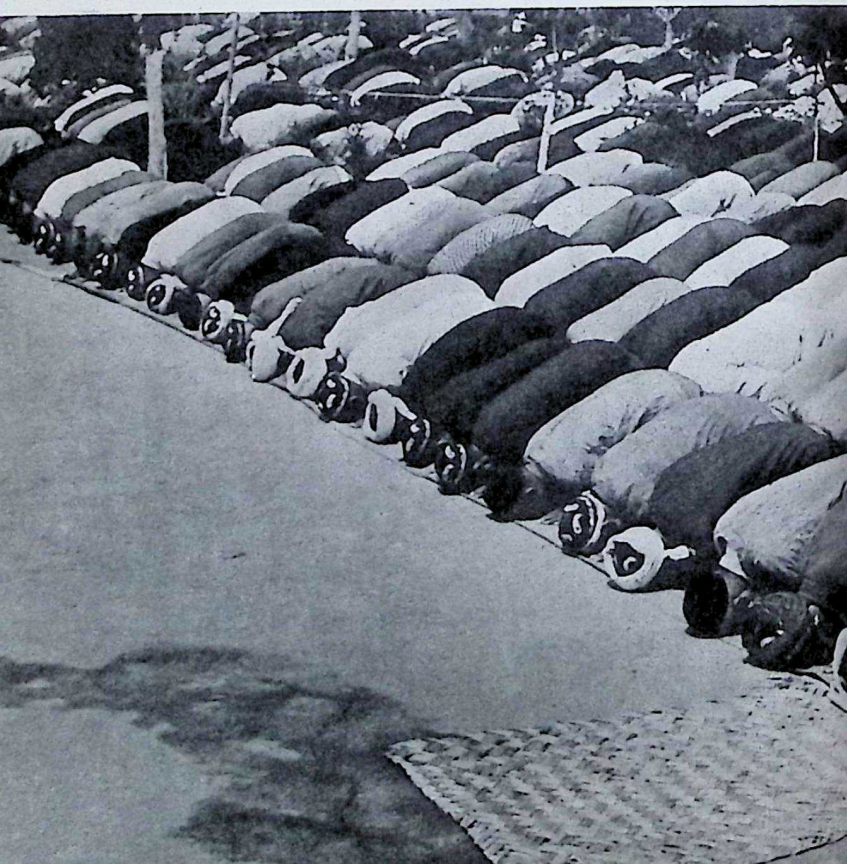

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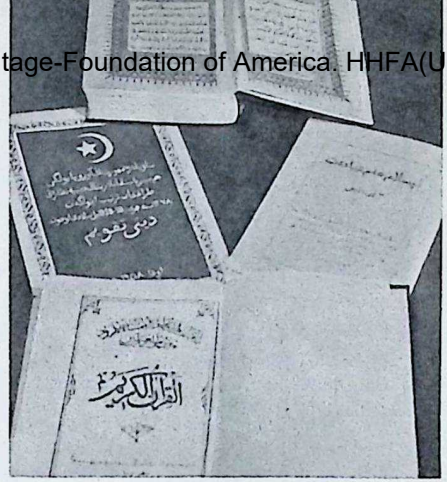

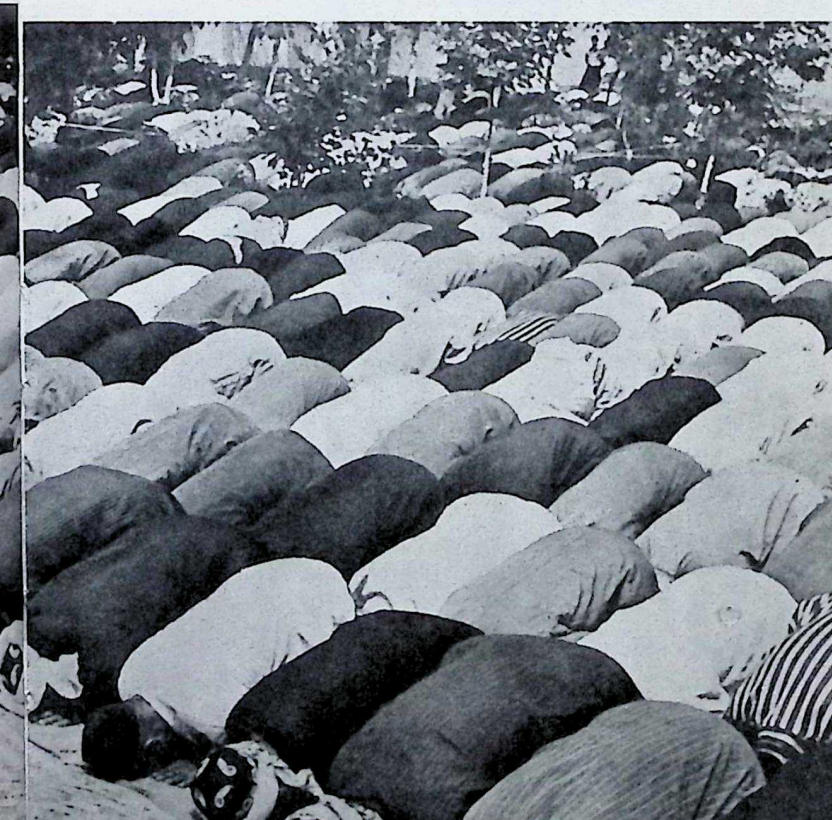

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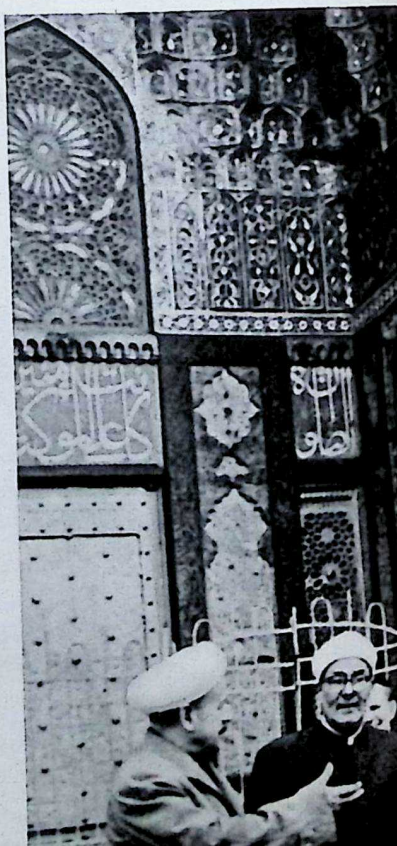

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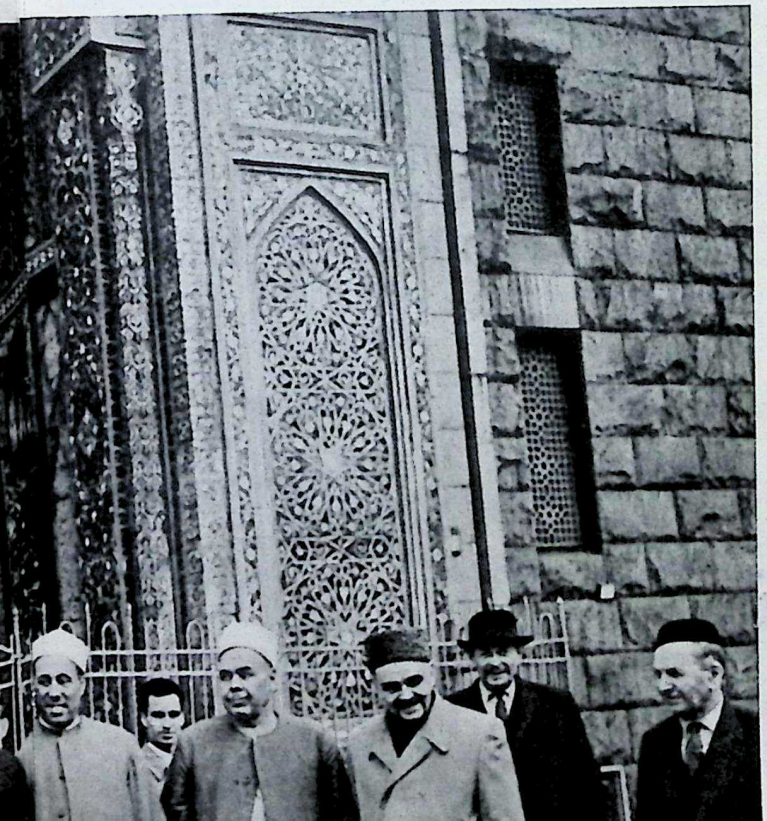

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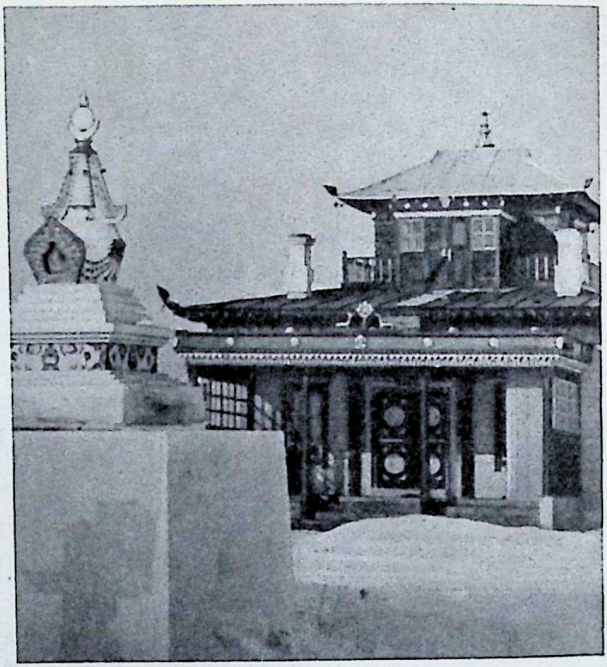

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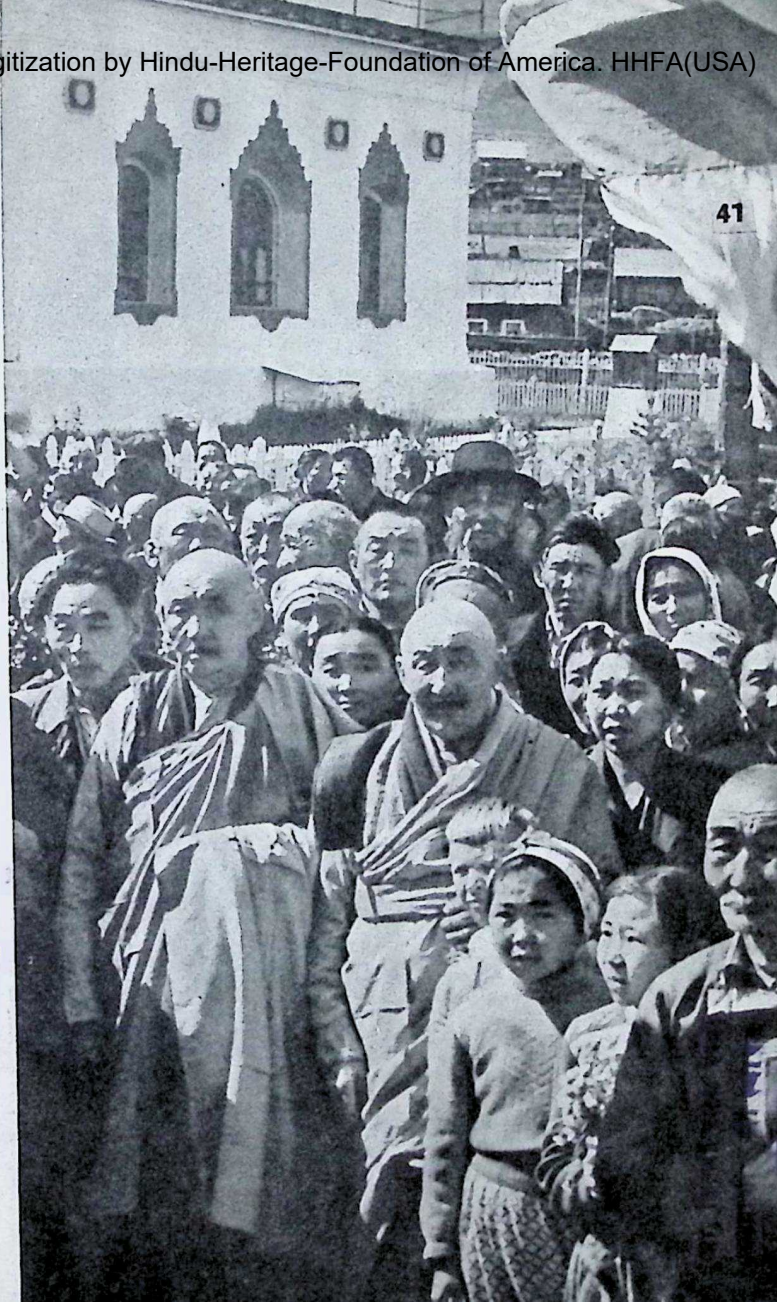

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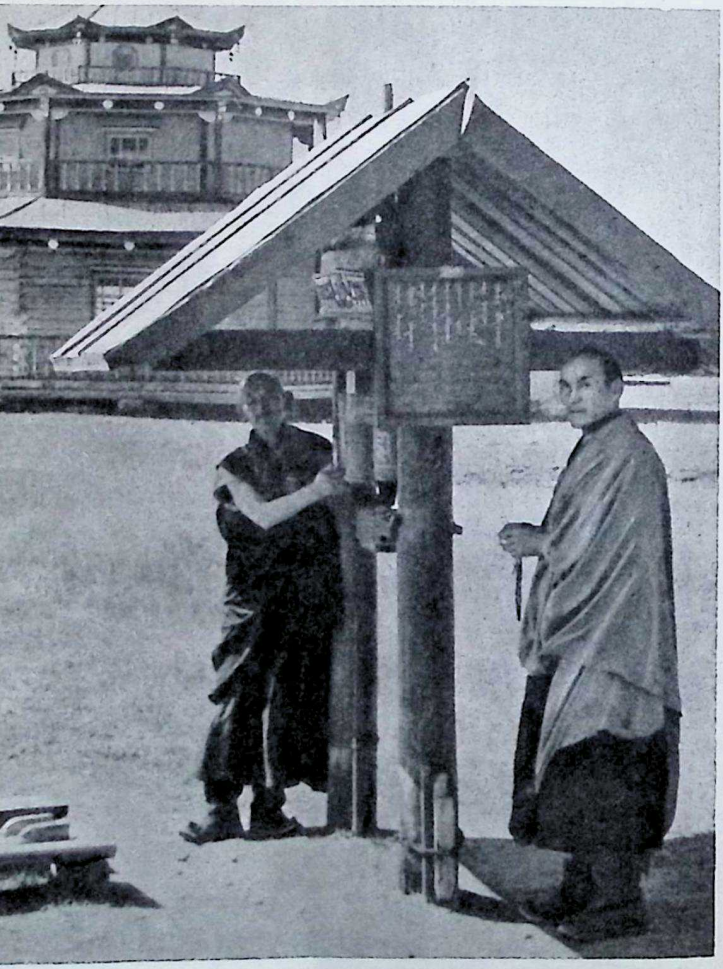

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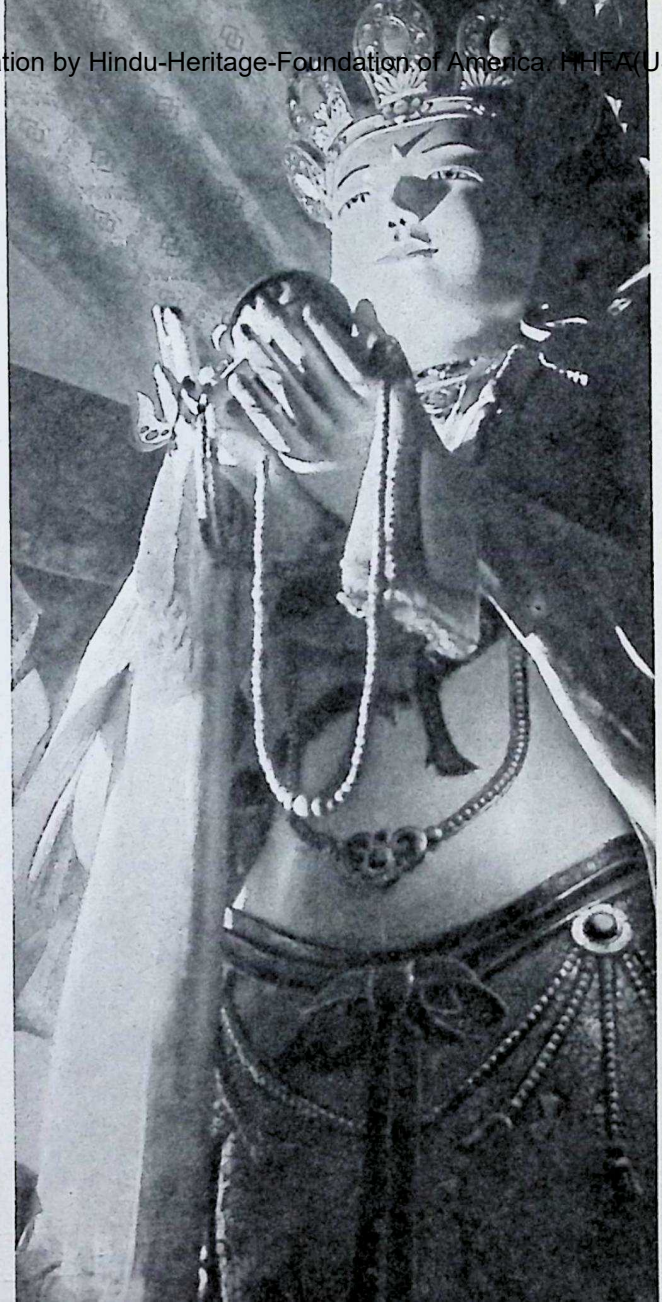

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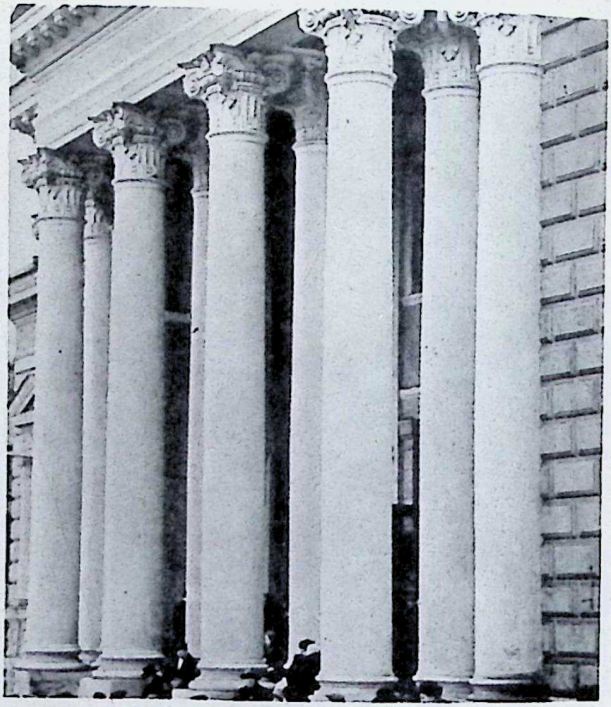

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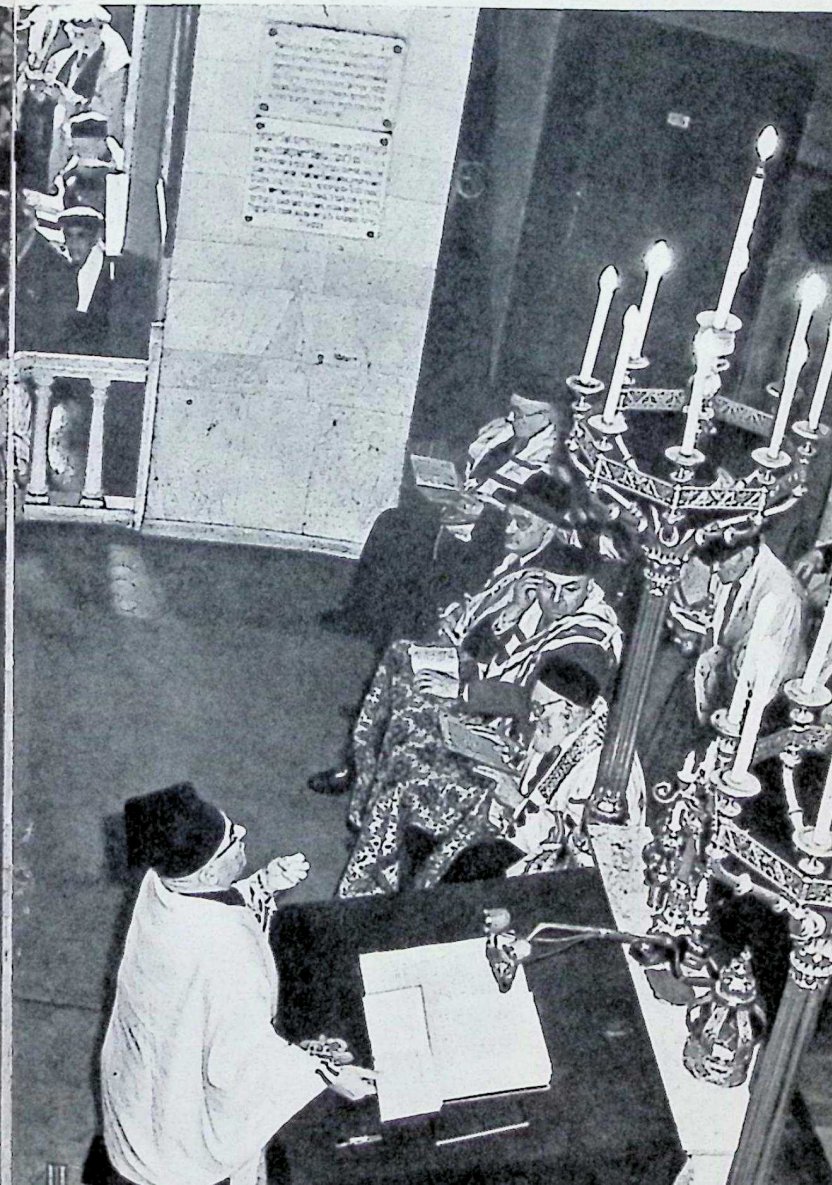

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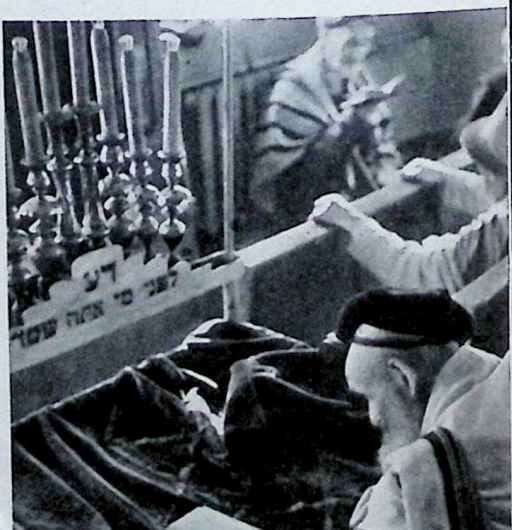

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